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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 000291

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/WE

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SUBJECT: FURTHER GOI VIEWS ON GAERC DISCUSSION OF IRAQ

REF: A) STATE 20813 B) STATE 18030 C) ROME 289

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CLASSIFIED BY: DCM EMIL SKODON. REASON:1.5 (B)(D)

11. (C) ON JANUARY 24, WE DELIVERED POINTS ON IRAQ DEBATE AT JANUARY 27 GAERC TO MFA DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR MULTILATERAL AFFAIRS GIANCARLO ARAGONA. ARAGONA TOLD DCM THAT THE GOI CONCURRED WITH THE USG VIEW THAT THE EU SHOULD NOT ISSUE A COMMON STATEMENT ON IRAQ AT THIS TIME. CONSENSUS AT THE GAERC ON SUCH A MESSAGE IS NOT REALISTIC, IF FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN THE UK WOULD FIRMLY OPPOSE A STATEMENT WHICH CALLED FOR A NEW UNSC RESOLUTION AS A CONDITION FOR MILITARY ACTION AGAINST IRAQ. HE SAID THAT THE U.S. COULD COUNT ON ITALY DOING ITS PART TO FOCUS DISCUSSIONS AWAY FROM A STATEMENT AND TOWARDS IRAQ'S NEED TO COMPLY WITH EXISTING COMMITMENTS ON DISARMAMENT. (COMMENT: WHILE REF C REPORTS MFA SYG BALDOCCI PROMISED TO WORK FOR A STRONG STATEMENT ON IRAQ FROM THE GAERC, ARAGONA'S POSITION TO OUR MORE SPECIFIC REQUEST SHOULD BE TAKEN AS THE AUTHORITATIVE GOI POLICY. END COMMENT).

12. (C) ARAGONA'S ADVICE TO THE USG WAS TO CONSULT WITH THE GREEK EU PRESIDENCY, WHICH IS UNDER INCREASING PRESSURE FROM SOME EU MEMBERS TO ISSUE A STATEMENT ON IRAQ AT THE GAERC. HE AVERRED THAT ATHENS MAY NOT BE AWARE HOW STRONGLY THE U.S. FEELS ON THIS ISSUE. ARAGONA EMPHASIZED THAT AT THEIR JANUARY 21 MEETING, SECRETARY POWELL HAD MADE CLEAR TO MINISTER FRATTINI THAT THE MESSAGE ON IRAQ MUST NOT BE DILUTED. FRATTINI UNDERSTANDS CLEARLY THE SECRETARY'S VIEWS ON THIS ISSUE, AND AGREES.

13. (C) IN A SIDE COMMENT, ARAGONA LAMENTED THAT RECENT NEWS
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ACCOUNTS IN THE ITALIAN PRESS REPORTING STATEMENTS BY THE WHITE HOUSE SPOKESMAN ON ITALIAN SUPPORT FOR MILITARY INTERVENTION IN IRAQ WITHOUT AN ADDITIONAL UNSC RESOLUTION DID NOT MAKE IT ANY EASIER TO MANAGE THE ALREADY DIFFICULT AND COMPLICATED EUROPEAN POLITICAL PANORAMA ON THIS ISSUE.

14. (C) SUBSEQUENT TO THE CONVERSATION WITH ARAGONA, FM FRATTINI'S CHIEF OF STAFF, CESARE RAGAGLINI, CALLED TO INFORM DCM THAT GREEK FM PAPANDREOU HAD CALLED FRATTINI TO DETERMINE THE GOI'S VIEWS ON A POTENTIAL STATEMENT. FRATTINI TOLD PAPANDREOU THAT THERE WAS NO CHANCE FOR CONSENSUS AT THE GAERC AND THAT THERE SHOULD BE NO ATTEMPT AT CRAFTING A COMMON STATEMENT. FRATTINI SAID THAT AT THE PRE-GAERC MEETING AMONG THE UK, FRANCE, ITALY, GERMANY, GREECE, AND SPAIN, ITALY WOULD COME OUT STRONGLY AGAINST A STATEMENT. THE MOST THE GOI WOULD SUPPORT WOULD BE A GENERAL ENDORSEMENT OF THE FIVE POINTS OUTLINED REF A.

15. (U) IN A PRESS STATEMENT ON THE AFTERNOON OF FEBRUARY 24, PM BERLUSCONI SAID THAT AFTER THE FRENCH AND GERMAN DECLARATIONS ON IRAQ, AND EU MEETING ON BRUSSELS ON THE MARGINS OF THE GAERC TO FIND A "UNITED SOLUTION" WOULD BE "PERFECTLY USELESS."

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